

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 000687

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SA, SA/INS, S/CT; NSC FOR E. MILLARD

LONDON FOR POL/RIEDEL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04-21-13

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [PREF](#) [CE](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: Muslim-Tamil Tiger violence flares anew in eastern Sri Lanka

Ref: (A) FBIS Reston VA DTG 201137Z APR 03
- (B) FBIS Reston VA DTG 190851Z APR 03
- (C) Colombo 658, and previous

(U) Classified by Lewis Amselem, Deputy Chief of Mission. Reasons: 1.5 (b, d)

1. (C) SUMMARY: Muslim-Tamil Tiger violence erupted in eastern Sri Lanka, April 17-18. Five people were reportedly killed, with many displaced. Muslim politicians have threatened to boycott Parliament if the GSL does not address the situation. After a lull in violence that lasted several months, Muslim-Tiger relations have nose-dived again. END SUMMARY.

=====
Violence in the East
=====

2. (SBU) Violence between Muslims and Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) supporters erupted in the Muttur area of eastern Sri Lanka, April 17-18. (Note: Muttur is a Muslim-dominated town in Trincomalee District. The population on the outskirts of the town is Tamil, with much of Muttur's hinterland controlled by the LTTE.) As with most communal incidents of this sort, the origins of the flare-up are murky, but seem to involve the abduction of two Muslims by the LTTE on March 31. After the mother of one of the men committed suicide in protest, tensions escalated into out-and-out fighting between Muslims and LTTE cadre. In the fighting, at least three Muslims and two LTTE supporters were reportedly slain. (Note: The two men who were abducted are missing and believed dead.)

3. (C) In reaction to news of the fighting, the government dispatched police and army reinforcements to Muttur to put a lid on the situation. Local curfews were imposed and the security situation had calmed down appreciably by April 19-20. Based on what we are hearing from contacts, including Interior Secretary M.N. Junaid, however, tensions remain extremely high in Muttur and in the rest of the ethnically-fractured east. In addition, the fighting left at least several hundred Muslims displaced, as many shops and homes were torched in the fighting. The government is grappling with the humanitarian situation now.

4. (C) In the meantime, the Norwegian-run Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) is trying to cool the situation down, asking the LTTE and local Muslims to meet to discuss their differences. The LTTE agreed to this, asking Muslims to come to meet them in LTTE-controlled territory. Muslims, upset over the venue, turned down the LTTE offer. The SLMM continues to try to arrange a meeting.

=====
Political Fallout
=====

5. (C) The political fallout from the violence was immediate. Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) leader Rauf Hakeem traveled to the Muttur area and announced that he would boycott Parliament if the government did not step in to address the situation right away. (Note: The United National Front government is reliant on SLMC support in Parliament for its slim majority.) Although he later backed off this threat, Hakeem's pointed comments were noticed and the government quickly sent a cabinet-level team to the east to look into the situation.

6. (C) ((Note: Tensions between the SLMC and the government were already high before Muttur exploded into violence. A public spat took place between pro-government Muslim and SLMC MPs early last week, with both sides slinging mud at the other. The exact context of the verbal attacks was unclear, but Hakeem was clearly insulted and said so publicly. End Note.)))
=====

COMMENT

=====

17. (C) After a lull in violence between the two sides that lasted several months, Muslim-Tiger relations have nose-dived again. Even beyond the local situation in Mutur, the ramifications of such violence are serious, as instability in the east serves to undermine the peace process in general. Moreover, the latest violence is not a constructive prelude to the seventh round of peace talks slated to take place April 29 - May 2 in Thailand. (Note: There have been some unconfirmed press reports that the Tigers may want to postpone this round of talks.) END COMMENT.

18. (U) Minimize considered.

WILLS